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578 the idea of an American orientation and conducted a great deal of propaganda in the United States. A dispute broke out also among the Far Eastern communists as to the selection of the Republican capital. Those who stood for greater independence suggested that the capital should be established there where contact with the non-Russian world was most intimate, in Vladivostok. The Bolshevik Central Committee, on the other hand, realized the dangers inherent in such a move. It ruled that the headquarters of the Far Eastern government should be in the Russian city of Chita and not in the cosmopolitan port of Vladivostok.

Throughout its existence the F.E.R. had a very difficult time. Parts of the Republic were occupied by Japanese troops and others were the scene of white guard activities. Accordingly, the government of the F.E.R. exercised only a nominal sovereignty over certain of its provinces. Paradoxically enough, the Japanese occupation of the F.E.R. was not only the chief source of its weakness but also its principal *raison d'être*. The setting-up of the F.E.R. enabled the Russian Far Easterners, particularly the peasant colonists, to support Soviet foreign policy and the Soviet fight against foreign intervention without identifying themselves with the Communist Party and its economic aspirations. On October 25th, 1922, the last Japanese soldier left the Russian mainland and the need for a 'Far Eastern Republic' ceased automatically. The Constituent Assembly of the F.E.R., in which the communists had four-fifths of all seats, decided to hand over its powers to a 'Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee', the *Dalrevkom*, which was already a direct organ of the Soviet Government.

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646 The decision of the Far Eastern Constituent Assembly did not mean that the Russians of the Far East were in any way united behind the Communist Party. The communists constituted a minority in the Far East even smaller than anywhere else in Soviet Russia. Early in 1922 they had only 7,000 members in the whole of the F.E.R., and this was on the eve of a purge which aimed at a reduction of the membership by 15 to 18 per cent.[2] The Party relied on the support of a section of the 'Far Eastern Trades Union Congress' (D.V.S.P.S.) which had 40,000 members; but how many of them really sympathized with the communists it is impossible to say. In view of its numerical weakness and isolation the communist movement in the Far East had to go carefully and had to make some concessions to regionalist tendencies. Many people in the Russian Far East continued to favour a special status for their homeland and hoped that after the abolition of the F.E.R. it would not become just another Soviet Russian province. At the beginning their hopes were not entirely betrayed.

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185 578 Plan in three years. The later development showed that it took not three but ten years to reach the target figures which the first Five-Year Plan had fixed for the coal and oil production of the Far East.* The Central Government refused to admit that the shortcomings in the Far East resulted from deficiencies of all-Union planning, and tried to put the blame on local scapegoats who were charged with committing deliberate sabotage. More than that, the Central Government alleged that the Far Eastern administrators were 'Japanese spies', although they were, presumably, no more connected with Japan than the Leningrad opposition was linked with Germany. The Far Eastern communists, it is true, had shown great eagerness to establish commercial relations with other Pacific countries including Japan, but this had been done with the agreement of the centre.

THE PURGE OF THE 'CIVILIANS'

661 687 ●665 Although there was no evidence for charges of high treason the Soviet Government carried out a purge on a vast scale throughout the Soviet Far East. It would be incorrect to say that there was one big purge. There were at least two purges, one directed primarily against 'civilian' communists, and another aimed mainly at the army. The first purge, which was closely connected with economic shortcomings, started in the first months of 1937 and led to the disappearance of the head of the administration of the F.E.T., Krutov, and of the party secretary, Lavrentev. At the same time administrative heads and party officials were sacked all over the Soviet Far East. For many months there were no 'first secretaries' in many city committees and district committees of the Communist Party.

There is one aspect of the purge of the 'civilians' in the Far East which deserves special mention, the purge of the railwaymen. The railwaymen of the Far East were traditionally the backbone of the Communist Party in that distant part of the Soviet Union, and the solidity of Moscow's connection with the Pacific coastal areas depended largely on their efficiency. In the 'thirties' their job became increasingly difficult. Between 1933 and 1936 the freight turnover of the Far Eastern railways had increased three times. This was more than they could stand. The Far Eastern railway system broke down. A great many accidents occurred. The Government asserted that they were all engineered 'on instructions of the Japanese intelligence service.' The supreme responsibility for the wrecking of trains was officially attributed to Trotsky and to the

* Production of oil was to reach 464,000 tons by the end of the first Five-Year Plan in 1932. In 1933 output was 196,000 tons; in 1936, 308,000 tons, and in 1938, 360,000 tons. The coal target for 1932 was 4,000,000 tons. In 1933 output had reached 2,020,000 tons, and in 1936, 3,617,000 tons. The target for 1937 was 5,000,000 tons, but actual production in 1938 was only 4,750,000 tons.

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661 687 665 various members of the so-called 'Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites' which was allegedly led by Bukharin. In the Far East itself the Soviet Government staged a big trial of leading railway officials working on the Amur railway line, a sector of the Trans-Siberian railway. The trial took place in the town of Svobodny. All forty-four defendants were sentenced to death as 'Japanese spies'. They included the deputy head of the Amur railway line, the head of its planning department, the deputy head of the locomotive service and many other people of similar standing in the Far Eastern railway transport.[5] The sentence of Svobodny had considerable repercussions throughout the F.E.T. Sweeping changes took place not only in the top leadership of the Far Eastern railways but also among the rank and file of the railwaymen. Demobilized soldiers were rapidly trained for the railway and called upon to fill the gaps opened by the purges.

The man who, in 1937, carried out the purge in the Soviet Far East was a complete newcomer to the territory. His name was Vareikis, he was Lithuanian-born and had occupied various important positions in European Russia, as party secretary first of Voronezh and later of Stalingrad. He was also a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party. When he arrived in Khabarovsk in the spring of 1937 he seemed to possess the full confidence of Stalin, but by the end of the year he had lost it. He was charged with surrounding himself with spies and white guardists. A case in point was the editor of the largest Far Eastern newspaper *Tikhookeanskaya Zvezda* (Far Eastern Star), Shver, who was expelled from the party by a special decision of the Central Committee taken at the beginning of October.[6] Vareikis survived his friend only by a few days.

THE PURGE OF THE FAR EASTERN ARMY

661 701 The disgrace of Vareikis and his supporters carried the disintegration of the party apparatus in the Far East a step further. Only one important force continued to exist in the F.E.T., the Special Far Eastern Army and its commander, Marshal Vasily Konstantinovich Blyukher. But it was clear that this last bulwark of Far Eastern 'autonomism' would, sooner or later, be affected by the big Stalinist clean up of Russia's military leadership. One of the defendants of the Tukhachevsky trial of June 1937, the commander of the Byelorussian Military District, Uborevich, had had important connections with the Far East. In 1922 he had been the liberator of Vladivostok and he had stayed in the F.E.T. for several years. There was another military person who was closely linked with Stalin's Far Eastern opponents, Gamarnik, the chief of the Political Administration of the Red Army and an Assistant People's Commissar for Defence. Had he not committed suicide he would most

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167 241 Eastern border areas the government made concessions even in the economic sphere. In European Russia only collective farmers were at that time allowed to own a cow as their own personal possession, never industrial or transport workers.

KOMSOMOL COLONIZATION

167 665 883 The military colonization largely overlaps with another special form of colonization in the Soviet Far East, which is carried out with the help of the Communist Youth League, the Komsomol. The Youth League is the backbone of the Far Eastern units of the Soviet Army. Towards the end of the inter-war period 60 to 70 per cent of the soldiers in the Far East were Komsomol members. Hence among the demobilized soldiers, too, there must have been a good deal of 'Komsomol spirit'. The Komsomol influence in the Far East is, however, by no means confined to the army. The entire Soviet Far East has been described as a 'Komsomol Territory'. This is true both in the figurative and in the literal sense. The Soviet Far East is 'komsomolsky' because it is a young pioneer country, but the Komsomol, the Communist Youth League, is also directly connected with the Soviet Far East as one of the principal promoters of its colonization.

Many Communist Youth League members went to the Far East as individuals out of a spirit of adventure and also out of a feeling of patriotic duty. The Komsomol, as an organization, was responsible for two big spectacular actions. One was the foundation of the town Komsomolsk-on-Amur, the other was the movement initiated by Madame Khetagurova.

The history of Komsomolsk goes back to the spring of 1932 when the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League chartered two steamers, *Kolumb* and *Komintern*, which sailed with 400 young people, including a number of Civil War orphans, to the village of Permskoe on the Lower Amur. (The village had been founded as early as 1858 by Russian peasant colonists hailing from the region of Perm in the eastern part of European Russia.) Even the first small party of Komsomol members outnumbered the local population of 160 inhabi- [361] tants. In the second half of 1932 many more young people arrived, and in December of the same year the All-Russian Executive Committee published a decree which transformed Permskoe into the town of Komsomolsk. The decree read well in the Moscow newspapers, but to the young builders of Komsomolsk it must have appeared utterly unrealistic. At the time when the decree was published they were in a state of despair. The building of the town had had to be interrupted in view of the harshness of the Russian Far Eastern winter, and the inexperience of the new settlers had resulted in great complications. During

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this early period of construction Komsomolsk had a street with the characteristic nickname of 'Street of Accidents', and a whole quarter was known as the 'Fire Settlement' ('Pozharny Posyolok').

Things in Komsomolsk went wrong for several years, and in 1937, when the city celebrated its fifth anniversary, the party authorities thought that the time had come to carry out a large-scale purge among the builders of the 'City of Youth'. One of the most distinguished citizens of the new town, the director of its metallurgical plant, then declared bluntly, 'We are mercilessly rooting out this scum of wreckers'.[19] 'This scum of wreckers' were people whom official Soviet propaganda had previously included among the selfless enthusiastic patriots engaged in self-sacrificing, heroic construction work. To justify the purge the party leadership alleged that 'agents of foreign intelligence services, bandits and diversionists' had penetrated into the ranks of workers and technicians of Komsomolsk, thanks to the complacency of certain leading personalities. According to the official version the 'enemies of the people' at work in Komsomolsk were very active and ingenious. They mixed concrete with sugar so that the degree of its cohesion was lowered, they put glass into ball-bearings to provoke accidents and destroyed vital blue-prints to delay the growth of local industry.

The real reason for the chaos in Komsomolsk was not the criminal activity of wreckers, but the lack of co-ordination between the various state trusts which owned the industrial enterprises in the town-to-be. Each of these trusts constructed a workers' settlement around its plant, and until 1940 there was no over-all building plan for the much advertised town of the Communist Youth League. This explains why sanitary conditions and municipal services were still practically non-existent, even by the outbreak of the Second World War.

The over-all building plan of Komsomolsk which came into being in 1940 provided for a population of 500,000.[20] Although the fulfilment of this aim is still far off, Komsomolsk has become an economic and cultural factor in the Far East. In 1947 the town had 100,000 inhabitants and was the proud owner of two undertakings of all-Union importance, the Iron and Steel Works, 'Amurstal', and a shipyard.[21] Cultural life, too, had developed greatly. The number of schools reached thirty-four in 1947 and forty-five in 1952. In addition, Komsomolsk has a Palace of Culture, a theatre, thirty libraries, a training college for teachers of secondary schools, a music school and four 'parks of culture and rest'.[22] It has tried to keep up its reputation as a 'City of Youth' and is still recruiting young workers from European Russia, particularly from among war orphans.

The second big Komsomol initiative for the settlement of the Far East, the Khetagurova movement, has its roots in the lack of women in the Far East and the necessity to remedy the situation. The well-

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Komitet'). The Tribal Committees of the lower order were later described as 'Native Soviets' ('Tuzsovety') of which there were 400 all over the Far East and Far North. The most remarkable fact about this tribal administration was that participation in tribal and native Soviets was not limited by class criteria.

This idyllic state of affairs could not last long. From one plenary meeting of the Committee of the North to the next the intransigence of its more radically minded members increased. In 1929 the Committee firmly decided to apply the principles of class struggle to the Far North, and from 1930 onwards, the tribal administration was abandoned. Regular organs of local government ranging from village Soviets to 'National Areas' ('Okrugs') were created instead. This meant in fact the end of the 'native reserves' which the Russian anthropologists had advocated in the early years of the Soviet régime. Under the new set-up Russian and other European Party and State officials were able to increase their influence in the running of native affairs. The natives were linked politically and administratively as closely as possible with the metropolitan territories of the U.S.S.R. In 1935, the Committee of the North itself was disbanded.

By the time of its abolition the Committee had lost a great deal of its previous importance. Many of its original duties had been taken over either by the Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route, 'Glavsevmorput', or by local government organs. The Chief Administration of the Northern Sea Route, which had at its disposal a large staff of experts on nationalities problems, was originally launched as a body with extremely wide powers. Among other things, it was supposed to look after the well-being of the Far Northern tribes, direct cultural work among them, organize health services and help to promote their 'sovietization'. In the autumn of 1938 the Soviet Government decided that 'Glavsevmorput' could not carry out these tasks properly. A decree of the Council of People's Commissars stipulated that it was to hand over to the territorial administrations all enterprises and institutions which were not directly connected with the development of the Northern Sea Route.[2]

COMMUNIST ADMINISTRATORS

The abolition of the Committee of the North in 1935, and the curtailing of the powers of the 'Glavsevmorput' in 1938, increased the responsibilities of the administrative authorities and party organizations of Khabarovsk. It cannot be said that the latter have shown great enthusiasm for work in the National Areas and National Districts of the small nationalities. In fact, up to 1939 most of the officials posted to distant parts of the Far Eastern (later Khabarovsk) Territory went

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647 665 there as a punishment. People who were an embarrassment to the authorities, for one reason or another, were frequently sent to the Arctic regions as administrators and Party secretaries. Most cases of abuse of which such ill-suited administrators had been guilty in distant territories were hushed up, but occasionally they became public, as in the case of the Soviet Commander of the Wrangel Island,* which is part of the Chukcha National Area, and situated off its Arctic coast.

The commander, whose name was Semenchuk, had committed the most outrageous arbitrary acts against both Chukchi and Eskimos, the native population of the island. He and his assistant, Startsev, had caused the death of a number of natives, but the Wrangel Island scandal would probably not have come to light had they not also assassinated the local Russian doctor. The two Soviet administrators were brought to Moscow as defendants in a big trial in which Vyshinsky himself acted as prosecutor. A sixty-five page Vyshinsky speech contains an exhaustive description of the Semenchuk régime on Wrangel Island. Semenchuk's authoritarian idea of the role of a Soviet administrator in the land of the Chukchi and Eskimos was summarised in the following pronouncement which he had made. 'I am the GPU here; I am the court, I am the Public Prosecutor. I have the power of life and death.'

Semenchuk and Startsev were sentenced to death and executed in 1936, but it is still a mystery how the Soviet Government could entrust the strategically important Wrangel Island to an outright criminal. Semenchuk had been in prison for the theft of silver cutlery from the Soviet Embassy in Teheran shortly before being dispatched to the Far North.[3]

The case of Semenchuk and Startsev is obviously an extreme one. There is no reason to doubt that some of the administrators are ardent idealists, determined to improve living conditions and promote education among the local peoples. If we can believe the Secretary of the Department of Cadres of the Khabarovsk Territorial Committee of the Communist Party, there has been a better selection of administrators for the distant areas of the Far East since 1939. The secretary in question had promised in that year that Party posts in these territories would be given in future only to particularly trustworthy persons. He had said,

648 167 * Russian sovereignty over Wrangel Island was established only with some difficulty Both Canada and the United States had striven to attach the island which has an area of 2,700 square miles to their respective territories. The Canadians established their claim by wintering on the island from 1921. They reasserted it by hoisting the flag there in 1921, and in 1922 the Canadian Prime Minister solemnly proclaimed the annexation of the island in a statement before the Ottawa Parliament. The Soviet régime can rightly claim to have rescued Wrangel Island for Russia. In 1924 the crew of the Soviet gunboat 'Red October' took it over and expelled the only Canadian who lived there, together with a group of 'anti-Soviet' Eskimos, who, they asserted, were engaged in illegal hunting of fur animals. The Soviet authorities then brought their own colonists from the mainland, mostly Chukchi and Eskimos, with a few Russians.

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indeed, 'The further away we send a man, the more we must be able to trust him'.[4] It can be taken for granted that a man whom the Communist Party considers particularly trustworthy will be a hard-working official, and that he will not commit any crimes such as those of which Semenchuk and Startsev had been convicted. But a trustworthy communist is not necessarily a man who understands the mentality of the Far Eastern aborigines, and who deals with their problems in the best way.

NATIVES, STATE TRUSTS AND FORCED LABOUR

In addition to the Party and the territorial administration, there is a third influential factor in the Far East which has a great impact on the 'natives', namely the big State capitalist organizations of Kamchatka, Chukotka and the territories around the Okhotsk Sea. Instead of assisting and strengthening native economy the Soviet régime encouraged the growth of State companies such as the 'Kamchatka Limited Company' (later known as 'Glavkamchatrybprom' – Kamchatka Chief Administration for the Fishing Industry), the 'State Reindeer Trust', the 'Dalrybtrest' (Far Eastern Fishing Trust) and 'Soyuzpushnina', the State organization for fur trading. Soviet experts on the Far East themselves have admitted that these enterprises employed people who were guided by a 'narrow-minded business attitude' and who discharged their duties in a 'crudely materialistic way'. All they wanted was to fulfil the target figures of the state plan. They were not interested in assisting the natives either by supplying the most essential food commodities or by encouraging cultural work. The enterprises concerned, in particular the Kamchatka Company and the Reindeer Trust, seized land, and hunting and fishing grounds traditionally belonging to the natives. Even land owned by newly established collective farms of reindeer-breeders was arbitrarily confiscated by State trusts.[5]

Another State enterprise, the previously mentioned 'Dalstroy', which operates around the Okhotsk Sea, has also greatly affected the life of the 'natives' who live in its territory. The first director of Dalstroy, E. Berzin, pointed out in 1936 that the trust had opened schools and hospitals in all centres of the native population. The budget of the native communities ('National Districts') had increased almost ten times during five years.[6] What Berzin did not say was that the native schools and hospitals had been built with the profits which Dalstroy had made by exploiting forced labour. As a matter of fact, some of the schools of which Berzin boasted are 'mixed schools', which are attended both by natives and by children of convicts who were born in captivity and taken away from their mothers.[7] In the area controlled by the Dalstroy we thus meet the most sinister aspect of the 'Soviet nationalities policy', namely, its